

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of:

PARENT ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

INGLEWOOD UNIFIED SCHOOL
DISTRICT.

OAH CASE NO. 2013120508

ORDER OF DETERMINATION OF
SUFFICIENCY OF DUE PROCESS
COMPLAINT

On December 16, 2013, Student's parent on behalf of Student (Student) filed a due process hearing request¹ (complaint) naming the Inglewood Unified School District (District). On December 18, 2013, Student filed a letter with the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). The letter was untitled, but appeared to provide additional facts relating to the complaint.

On December 27, 2013, the District filed a notice of insufficiency (NOI) as to Student's complaint.

APPLICABLE LAW

The named parties to a due process hearing request have the right to challenge the sufficiency of the complaint.² The party filing the complaint is not entitled to a hearing unless the complaint meets the requirements of Title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A).

A complaint is sufficient if it contains: (1) a description of the nature of the problem of the child relating to the proposed initiation or change concerning the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child; (2) facts relating to the problem; and (3) a proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the party at the time.³ These

¹ A request for a due process hearing under Education Code section 56502 is the due process complaint notice required under Title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A).

² 20 U.S.C. § 1415(b) & (c).

³ 20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii)(III) & (IV).

requirements prevent vague and confusing complaints, and promote fairness by providing the named parties with sufficient information to know how to prepare for the hearing and how to participate in resolution sessions and mediation.⁴

The complaint provides enough information when it provides “an awareness and understanding of the issues forming the basis of the complaint.”⁵ The pleading requirements should be liberally construed in light of the broad remedial purposes of the IDEA and the relative informality of the due process hearings it authorizes.⁶ Whether the complaint is sufficient is a matter within the sound discretion of the Administrative Law Judge.⁷

DISCUSSION

Neither the initial complaint filed on December 16, 2013, nor the letter filed on December 18, 2013, is sufficient to meet the legal standard for a due process hearing request. Student’s two documents contain a narration of facts but do not specify the issues against the District. Student does not list which actions denied Student a FAPE or why those actions caused a denial of FAPE. The remedies sought (an apology and monetary damages) do not clarify the issues. In its current form, the complaint does not provide sufficient information for the District to respond.

A parent who is not represented by an attorney may request that OAH provide a mediator to assist the parent in identifying the issues and proposed resolutions that must be included in a complaint.⁸ Parents are encouraged to contact OAH for assistance if they intend to amend their due process hearing request.

⁴ See, H.R.Rep. No. 108-77, 1st Sess. (2003), p. 115; Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, 1st Sess. (2003), pp. 34-35.

⁵ Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, *supra*, at p. 34.

⁶ *Alexandra R. v. Brookline School Dist.* (D.N.H., Sept. 10, 2009, No. 06-cv-0215-JL) 2009 WL 2957991 at p.3 [nonpub. opn.]; *Escambia County Board of Educ. v. Benton* (S.D.Ala. 2005) 406 F. Supp.2d 1248, 1259-1260; *Sammons v. Polk County School Bd.* (M.D. Fla., Oct. 28, 2005, No. 8:04CV2657T24EAJ) 2005 WL 2850076 at p. 3[nonpub. opn.] ; but cf. *M.S.-G. v. Lenape Regional High School Dist.* (3d Cir. 2009) 306 Fed.Appx. 772, at p. 3[nonpub. opn.].

⁷ Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children With Disabilities, 71 Fed.Reg. 46540-46541, 46699 (Aug. 14, 2006).

⁸ Ed. Code, § 56505.

If Student's parent wishes to contact OAH by telephone to request mediator assistance in drafting an amended complaint, the OAH telephone number is: (916) 263-0880.

ORDER

1. Student's complaint is insufficiently pled under Title 20 United States Code section 1415(c)(2)(D).
2. Student's parent shall be permitted to file an amended complaint under Title 20 United States Code section 1415(c)(2)(E)(i)(II).⁹
3. The amended complaint shall comply with the requirements of Title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii), and shall be filed not later than 14 days from the date of this order.
4. If Student's parent fails to file a timely amended complaint, the complaint will be dismissed.
5. All dates previously set in this matter are vacated.

Dated: December 30, 2013

/s/

SUSAN RUFF
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings

⁹ The filing of an amended complaint will restart the applicable timelines for a due process hearing.